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ABSTRACT

This handbook contains everything needed to prepare instructional materials for conducting a PLACES (Parents Learning to Assist Children in the Elementary School) workshop. The handbook contains three sections. The Participant Manual (composed of all left-facing pages) consists of materials needed for the four sessions (17 activities) of the workshop. The sessions focus on four topics: introduction to school success, working with your child at home, working with the teacher, and working with the school. Materials include questionnaires, learning activities, values clarification quizzes, case studies, and problem solving. The teacher/facilitator's guide (all right-facing pages) includes brief introductory notes to the adult education director and to the facilitator, as well as specific suggestions/directions for conducting each activity of the workshop. Finally, the appendix, entitled "How to Conduct a PLACES Workshop," provides step-by-step instructions for conducting the workshop. (KC)

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P.L.A.C.E.S.

Parents Learning to Assist Children in the Elementary School: A Workshop for Parents

HANDBOOK

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Handbook Written by Thomas Valentine

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Parents Learning to Assist Children in the Elementary School

A Workshop for Parents

Contents of This Handbook

This handbook contains everything needed to prepare instructional materials for conducting a PLACES workshop. The facilitator (teacher) will need a copy of the entire handbook, which includes:

1) The Participant Manual. Participant Manuals can be produced by xeroxing all left-facing pages (i.e., those on the reader's right) except for those in the appendix and the first title page. The Participant Manual should thus include one title page, a table of contents, and pages 1 through 28.

2) The Guide. This includes brief introductory notes to the adult education director and to the facilitator, as well as specific suggestions/directions for conducting each activity. The Guide consists of all right-facing pages (i.e., those on the reader's left) except for those in the appendix. The page numbers of the Guide correspond exactly to the facing pages in the Participant Manual, and are numbered consecutively as "Guide/1," "Guide/2," etc. Such an arrangement may appear convoluted at first, but it is the only way to allow for easy reproduction of a consecutively numbered Participant Manual and efficient use on the part of the facilitator.

3) The Appendix. The Appendix, entitled "How to Conduct a PLACES Workshop," appears at the end of the handbook and provides step-by-step instructions for conducting the workshop. Pages in the Appendix are numbered consecutively as "A1," "A2," etc.

Because the Table of Contents at right is designed to be part of the Participant Manual, it refers only to those pages which appear in that manual.

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A Note to the Adult Education Director

PLACES represents an easy and inexpensive way for your program to address an adult life-coping skill of critical importance -- parenting. Your program might already offer some form of parent education, perhaps focusing on nutrition or child development. The focus of PLACES is different, in that its sole purpose is to help undereducated parents learn how to facilitate the school success of their elementary-aged children.

Here are four reasons why you might want to consider offering a PLACES workshop in your program:

1) PLACES is designed to complement and extend your existing basic skills programming. The workshop provides an opportunity for your adult learners to apply their reading, writing, reasoning, and oral communication skills to a topic of vital importance in their own life situations. (Our own research indicates that over 45% of adult basic skills students in New Jersey have school-aged children.)
2) PLACES can be taught by any competent adult educator (though the workshop will work best if the facilitator is also a parent.) No special training is necessary beyond a thorough understanding of this handbook.
3) Except for this handbook, no instructional materials need to be purchased. The appendix gives specific directions for xeroxing Participant Manuals from masters contained in this handbook.
4) PLACES provides you with an opportunity to gain local visibility through supporting K-12 education in your district. In some cases you may choose to work with local school personnel for purposes of planning and recruitment. Specific suggestions are included in the appendix.

We hope you will take the time to read the appendix and look over the activities contained in this handbook. If PLACES looks good to you, please share it with your staff and colleagues.

A Note to the Facilitator (Teacher)

PLACES is a self-contained adult education workshop which can help parents, especially undereducated parents, learn how to facilitate the school success of their elementary-aged children. The workshop is predicated on the belief that parents themselves are a vital resource for identifying the educational needs and for solving the school-related problems of their children. Consequently, PLACES is lacking such typical (and usually sound) curriculum features as behavioral objectives and stated competencies. Instead, PLACES presents parents with a series of problem-solving activities focused on key elements of those parent-child-school interactions which can enhance or deter a child's educational success.

The problem-centered workshop format puts some special demands on the facilitator. To some extent, this format forces you to relinquish some of the power that teachers normally have over learners. It is not like teaching fractions, where you know all the correct answers and your job is simply to convey what you already know to comparatively passive learners. Instead, it is your job to stimulate and orchestrate the active discussion of active adult learners. In short (and in our opinion), PLACES represents adult education at its very best.

In order to successfully conduct a PLACES workshop, it will be necessary for you to thoroughly familiarize yourself with the contents of this handbook, including the appendix, which includes step-by-step instructions for conducting the workshop. We hope you decide to give PLACES a try in your program, and we would be happy to receive feedback about the effectiveness of the workshop from you and from your learners.

A Note to Parents

Being a parent is one of the hardest jobs in the world. Think of all of the things you have to do! You have to make sure that your children have food, clothes, and a nice place to live. You have to make sure that your children have enough love and understanding. And, if you want your children to have happy and successful lives, you have to make sure that your children get a good education.

PLACES is a special workshop which can help you make sure that your children succeed in school. During the workshop, you will have a chance to talk to other parents about important school problems. You will also have a chance to talk about your own children. The workshop has four sessions. If you really want to help your children, it is important that you come to every session.

We are glad that there are parents like you in the world -- parents who care enough to give up their valuable time to make a special effort to help their children. We hope that the PLACES workshop will help you learn a lot about your children, about their school, and about yourself as a parent.

Sincerely,

Gordon Darkenwald
Thomas Valentine

Rutgers University

Overview
SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

Session One has two major goals:

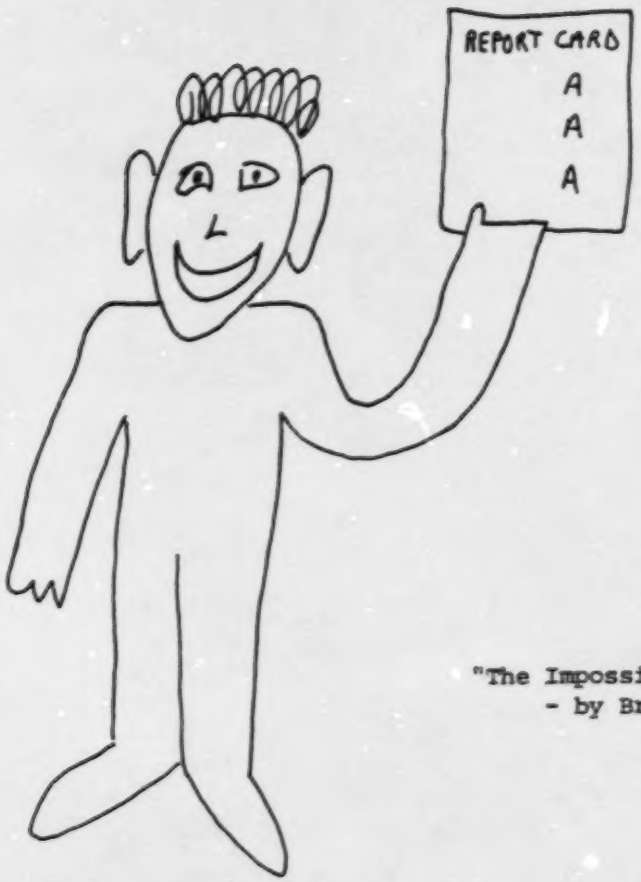
1) to cement the group so that they can begin functioning as a problem-solving unit.

2) to encourage participants to formulate personal definitions of "school success"

In order to complete all planned activities, it will be necessary to start promptly and adhere to the following schedule:

Time allotted	Activity
15 minutes	Orientation
45 minutes	Activity #1: New Friends
5 minutes	Break
40 minutes	Activity #2: School Success
*variable	Activity #3: Who Wants to See Children Succeed in School?
10 minutes	Wrap-up
5 minutes	Assign Activity #4: Interviewing Your Child (to be done at home)

*Activity #3 is an optional activity, and should be undertaken only if time allows.



"The Impossible Dream"
- by Brad K., Grade 6

Orientation

Duration: 15 minutes Start: 0:01 End: 0:15

Purpose: To clarify the purpose for PLACES and to provide substantive and logistical information about the workshop.

Procedures:

1) As participants enter, have them take seats and make up name plates, as described in the Appendix (see page A3). Distribute Participant Manuals.
2) When participants are situated, welcome them and introduce yourself. Tell them that you will spend a few minutes talking about the course and answering any questions they may have.
3) Have the participants open to page 1 of their Manuals and read along silently as you read aloud "A Note to Parents." (Repeated below for your convenience.) Allow participants to react and ask questions.
4) Have participants turn to page 3 in their Manuals and read along silently as you read aloud. Allow them time to ask questions and to fill in all necessary blanks. When you get to the rules in Item 7, be sure to ask the participants what they think of each rule. Do any need to be changed? Are there any other rules needed?
5) Finally, ask if there are any other questions. Do the participants know why they are there?

A Note to Parents
(appears on page 1 of Participant Manual)

Being a parent is one of the hardest jobs in the world. Think of all of the things you have to do! You have to make sure that your children have food, clothes, and a nice place to live. You have to make sure that your children have enough love and understanding. And, if you want your children to have happy and successful lives, you have to make sure that your children get a good education.

PLACES is a special workshop which can help you make sure that your children succeed in school. During the workshop, you will have a chance to talk to other parents about important school problems. You will also have a chance to talk about your own children. The workshop has four sessions. If you really want to help your children, it is important that you come to every session.

We are glad that there are parents like you in the world--parents who care enough to give up their valuable time to make a special effort to help their children. We hope that the PLACES workshop will help you learn a lot about your children, about their school, and about yourself as a parent.

Sincerely,

Gordon Darkenwald
Thomas Valentine

Rutgers University

Orientation (15 minutes)

1) PLACES can help you learn how to help your children succeed in school. Anyone completing the workshop will be awarded a certificate of completion.

2) PLACES is not a regular course. It is a workshop, or discussion group. It can only work for you if you participate in the discussions. Please be sure to ask questions and speak your mind.

3) The workshop leader's name is _____
I can get in touch with him/her by calling _____

4) Time. PLACES consists of four sessions, each two hours long.
Your group will meet every _____
Sessions will begin at _____ and end at _____

5) Place. The sessions will be held at _____
_____ in room _____

6) The topics to be covered in the sessions are:

Session One:	Introduction to School Success
Session Two:	Working with Your Child
Session Three:	Working with the Teacher
Session Four:	Working with the School

7) PLACES works best when everyone follows certain rules. Do you agree with the following rules?

a. In most cases, you must attend all four sessions in order to receive a certificate. If you have a special problem, please call the group leader to see if special arrangements can be made for you to complete the course.
b. The sessions must begin and end exactly on time.
c. Because there is so much to cover, each activity must begin and end on time. Usually, the group leader will remind you when time is up. The times for most activities are printed in your Manual. If there is a clock in the room, please help the group leader keep track of time.
d. You should feel free to express your opinions. Don't be afraid to disagree with other group members or with the group leader.
e. Please do not talk when someone else is talking. Don't interrupt. If you think you will forget what you have to say, make a note in your Manual.
f. This Manual belongs to you. It will not be collected or checked by the teacher. Mark it any way you like. Takes notes on the backs of the pages.

Activity #1: New Friends

Duration: 45 minutes Start: 0:16 End: 1:00

Purpose: To cement the group by allowing each participant to learn something about the other members of the group.

Procedures:

1) Tell the group that, now that we all know why we're here, the time has come to meet the other members of the group. Tell them that each of them is going to interview one member of the group, and then introduce him or her to everyone else.
2) Divide the group into pairs, being sure to pair participants with people they do not know. If the group consists of an odd number of participants, pair the odd participant with yourself.
3) Have participants open to page 4 and follow along as you read aloud. Tell them that it will be their job to fill in the blanks during the interview.
4) Allow the pairs 15 minutes to complete the interviews, and to get to know one another.
5) Reconvene the group and have each member introduce his/her partner to the group. If you have participated in the interview, you should go first to break the ice. Otherwise, ask for a volunteer.
6) Allow the group to ask questions of the person being introduced and to make comments. Remember, that the purpose of this activity is to set a non-threatening atmosphere for future activities. Keep it informal, and don't allow anyone to be "grilled."

Break

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 1:01 End: 1:05

Hopefully, coffee can be provided. Invite participants to bring their own snacks.

Activity #1: New Friends (45 minutes)

1. This is my new friend (name) _____.

   He/she has (number) _____ children. Their names and ages are:

Name	Age
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____
_____	____

2. I asked my new friend to describe one of his/her elementary school children to me and this is what I found out:

   Name: _____

   Age: ____ Grade: ____ School: _____

   What does the child look like? _____

   _____

   What are the child's favorite things? _____

   _____

   Does the child like school? ____ Why or why not? _____

   _____

   What is the child's favorite subject? _____

   What is the child's biggest school problem? _____

   _____

3. Then I asked my friend if school was important and he/she said

   ____ because _____

   _____

   _____.

Activity #2: School Success

Duration: 40 minutes Start: 1:06 End: 1:45

Purpose: To encourage participants, as individuals and as a group, to define "school success."

Procedures:

1) Have the participants open to page 5 of their Manuals and read along silently as you read the entire page aloud. Tell them not to mark anything yet. Clarify the task as necessary. In order to dispel the notion that there are correct and incorrect answers, tell them that all of the choices are important, but that they have to decide which are the most important for them.
2) Allow participants approximately 5 minutes to make their choices and to prepare to defend them. The lines at the bottom of the page can be used to jot notes.
3) Run through the list item by item. Read each item, and ask if anyone has circled it. If so, ask one or two participants to tell why. Then ask the group if they agree. If no one has selected an item, ask the group if they think it is unimportant and, if so, why. Encourage discussion on each item.
4) After you have run through the list, ask if anyone wants to change the items they have chosen. Have them do so.
5) In order to try to reach some kind of consensus, take a vote on the ten items. (How many participants chose Item 1? Item 2? etc.)
6) Summarize the discussion, highlighting the four or five most popular items. Although consensus is desirable, be sure to allow for disagreement.

Activity #2: School Success (40 minutes)

Most parents want their children to succeed in school. But what does "school success" really mean? When you think about it, school success is very complicated! The list below contains things that some people believe are important for school success. Circle the three things that you think are the most important.

School Success means:

1. Learning as much as you can.
2. Making the teacher like you.
3. Enjoying school.
4. Enjoying learning, even when you are not in school.
5. Getting good grades.
6. Making friends at school.
7. Finding out about yourself.
8. Learning how to study and work hard.
9. Learning to get along with other people.
10. Preparing for the future.

Be ready to tell the group why you circled the things you did.

Activity #3: (optional) Who Wants to See Children Succeed in School?

NOTE: IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW LONG GROUP DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES WILL LAST. IF YOU HAVE A LARGE GROUP OR A TALKATIVE GROUP, ACTIVITY #2 WILL TAKE AT LEAST 40 MINUTES; IF THIS OCCURS, SKIP ACTIVITY #3. IF, AND ONLY IF, YOU FIND THAT YOU HAVE AT LEAST 10 MINUTES TO SPARE AT THIS POINT, YOU CAN BEGIN ACTIVITY #3. REMEMBER TO LEAVE AMPLE TIME TO WRAP UP THE SESSION AND TO ASSIGN ACTIVITY #4 (A HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT).

Duration: variable Start: variable End: 1:45

Purpose: To encourage participants to realize that they are not alone in wanting their children to succeed in school.

Procedures:

1) Have participants open to page 6 and read along silently as you read aloud.
2) Use your judgment in structuring this activity. You have at least two options:
   - Have learners work silently through some or all of the five items, then discuss each item as in Activity #2, or
   - work through the items as a group.
3) However you structure the session, Items 1 and 2 should receive the major emphasis; discussion of these items will contribute most to subsequent activities. Some likely reasons follow:
   - The reasons given for Item 1 will probably revolve around self-esteem, earning the respect of others, and "making life easier."
   - The reasons given for Items 2 and 3 will probably revolve around job satisfaction and self-esteem.
   - The reasons given for Item 4 will proably revolve around the necessity of a good education for a successful later life (i.e., the future application of academic skills).

Activity #3: Who Wants to See Children Succeed in School?

Parents are not the only ones who want their children to succeed in school. Here are a list of some other people who like to see school success:

1. The child

2. The teacher

3. The principal

4. Employers

Can you think of one reason why each of these people want children to succeed? Write your answers on the spaces below.

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

Wrap-Up

Duration: 10 minutes Start: 1:46 End: 1:55

Purpose: To summarize the results of the foregoing activities and to allow participants to raise any questions they might have.

Procedures:

1) Begin by saying, "HERE'S WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED IN SESSION ONE:"
   a. "WE'VE CLARIFIED WHAT PLACES IS ALL ABOUT. ARE THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WORKSHOP? DOES EVERYONE KNOW WHEN AND WHERE THE NEXT SESSION WILL BE HELD?"
   b. "WE'VE GOTTEN TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER. DOES ANYONE HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR ME OR ANYONE ELSE IN THE GROUP?"
   c. "WE'VE DISCUSSED THE MEANING OF SCHOOL SUCCESS." At this point, you should summarize the major outcomes of that discussion. Ask the group if they have any additional comments or questions.
   d. (Optional -- read only if the group has completed Activity #3.) "WE'VE FOUND OUT THAT PARENTS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO WANT CHILDREN TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL." Summarize the activity and ask if there are any additional comments or questions.
2) Finally, ask if anyone has anything else they would like to say. Were participants satisfied with this session? NOW ASSIGN ACTIVITY #4, BELOW.

Activity #4: Interviewing Your Child (to be done at home)

Assign during the last 5 minutes of session.

Purpose: To allow participants to better understand their child's perceptions of school.

Procedures:

1) Tell participants that there is a "homework" assignment due next session. They will not have to hand it in, but they will discuss it in the next session.
2) Have participants open to page 7 of their Manuals and read along silently as you read the entire page aloud.
3) Make sure that the participants understand the directions and each of the questions. Reword the questions if necessary.
4) Tell the participants the purpose for the exercise: we want to know what their children think about school. Tell them not to put words into the mouths of the children. Tell them, however, not to accept such answers as "Nothing" or "I don't remember."
5) Allow the participants to ask clarifying questions.

Activity #4: Interviewing Your Child (to be done at home)

DIRECTIONS: Choose one of your elementary school children, and ask him/her the following ten questions. Ask the questions one afternoon or evening after a normal school day (not a half-day or class trip day). Write the answers on the space provided.

1. Did you enjoy school today? ____ Why or why not? _____

_____

2. What was the best thing that happened today in school? _____

_____

3. What was the worst thing that happened today in school? _____

_____

4. What did you do in Reading today? _____

_____

Were you good at it? ____ Why or why not? _____

5. What did you do in Math today? _____

_____

Were you good at it? ____ Why or why not? _____

_____

6. Tell me 3 other things you learned in school today?

a. _____
b. _____
c. _____

7. What do you like best about your teacher? (If child has more than one teacher, have him/her talk about one.) _____
_____. Why? _____

_____

8. What do you like least about your teacher? _____
_____. Why? _____

_____

9. What is your hardest subject? _____ Why is it hard for you? _____

10. What is your easiest subject? _____ Why is it easy for you? _____

Overview
SESSION TWO: WORKING WITH YOUR CHILD AT HOME

Session Two has four major goals:

1) To encourage participants to better understand their child's perceptions of school.

2) To encourage participants to recognize the importance of discussing school with their children on a regular basis.

3) To allow participants to recognize the importance of structuring the home environment to support learning.

4) To encourage participants to formulate a plan for supervising homework.

In order to complete all planned activities, it will be necessary to start promptly and adhere to the following schedule:

Time Allotted	Activity
5 minutes	Introduction to Session Two
25 minutes	Discussion of Activity #4: Interviewing Your Child
25 minutes	Activity #5: Talking with Your Child About School
5 minutes	Break
30 minutes	Activity #6: Structuring the Home for Learning
20 minutes	Activity #7: Supervising Homework
*variable	Activity #8: Finding Out About Your Child's School
5 minutes	Wrap-up
5 minutes	Assign Activity #9: Improving Your Home for Learning (to be done at home)

*Activity #8 is an optional activity, and should be undertaken only if time allows.

"Studying with My Father While the Dog Sleeps"
- by Karen Z., Grade 3

SESSION TWO
WORKING WITH YOUR CHILD AT HOME

Introduction to Session Two

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 0:01 End: 0:05

Purpose: To provide an overview of the session

Procedures:

1) As participants enter, have them take seats and set up their name plates.
2) Tell them that last week's session dealt with what it means to be successful in school. Today's session will deal with the things parents can do in their own homes to help children succeed in school.
3) Tell them that you will be dealing with three main topics:
   - communicating with children
   - structuring the home for learning
   - supervising homework
4) Tell them that the session will begin by discussing the interviews they conducted with their own children.

Discussion of Activity #4: Interviewing Your Child

Duration: 25 minutes Start: 0:06 End: 0:30

Purpose: To encourage participants to better understand their child's perceptions of school.

Procedures:

1) Have the participants open to page 7 of their manuals.
2) Ask: "HOW DID IT GO?" "ANY SPECIAL PROBLEMS?" "DID YOU ENJOY THE INTERVIEW?" "DID YOUR CHILD ENJOY THE INTERVIEW?"
3) Run through the items one by one, with you reading each question, and two or three participants volunteering the answers their children supplied.
4) If discussion occurs spontaneously, fine. Ask probing questions throughout (e.g., "WHY DO YOU THINK HE/SHE SAID THAT?" "DO YOU THINK HE/SHE IS RIGHT?")
5) If discussion does not occur, or if you have time left after completing the ten items, ask some or all of the following questions:
   - "WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOUR CHILD DURING THIS INTERVIEW?"
   - "WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL DAY?"
   - "OVERALL, DOES YOUR CHILD LIKE GOING TO SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?"
   - "DOES YOUR CHILD SEEM TO THINK THAT SCHOOL IS IMPORTANT? WHY OR WHY NOT?"
   - "ANY OTHER COMMENTS?"

NOTE: PAGE 9 OF THE PARTICIPANT MANUAL SIMPLY REPEATS THE QUESTIONS WHICH APPEAR ON THE INTERVIEW FORM ON PAGE 7. CONSEQUENTLY, PAGE 9 WILL BE OF LITTLE IMMEDIATE USE TO STUDENTS. IT WILL, HOWEVER, ENABLE YOU TO CONDUCT THE DISCUSSION WITHOUT FLIPPING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN PAGES.

We will begin Session Two by discussing Activity #4, which you completed at home with your child. You should have asked your child the following questions:

1) Did you enjoy school today? Why or why not?

2) What was the best thing that happened in school today?

3) What was the worst thing that happened in school today?

4) What did you do in Reading today? Were you good at it? Why or why not?

5) What did you do in Math today? Were you good at it? Why or why not?

6) Tell me 3 other things you learned in school today?

7) What do you like best about your teacher? Why?

8) What do you like least about your teacher? Why?

9) What is your hardest subject? Why is it hard for you?

10) What is your easiest subject? Why is it easy for you?

Your answers should be written on page 7. You might want to use this page some day to interview one of your other children, or to interview the same child when he/she is older.

Activity #5: Talking with Your Child About School

Duration: 25 minutes Start: 0:31 End: 0:55

Purpose: To encourage participants to recognize the importance of discussing school with their children on a regular basis.

Procedures:

1) Say something like this: "THIS ACTIVITY IS ABOUT TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT SCHOOL. WHEN YOU DID THE INTERVIEW WE JUST DISCUSSED, YOU WERE TALKING TO YOUR CHILD IN A VERY SPECIAL WAY. BUT YOU CAN'T INTERVIEW YOUR CHILD ALL THE TIME. IT WOULD GET BORING, AND BOTH YOU AND YOUR CHILD WOULD BEGIN TO HATE IT."
2) Have participants open to page 10 of their manuals and read along as you read Part I aloud, including points a through d. (NOTE: You will probably have to define "interrogate").
3) Ask one or two members of the group to describe the communication described in each of the four points. Ask them why they think each is good or bad communication.
4) Some comments you might want to make (if the group doesn't do so) are:
   a. doesn't include listening on the part of the parent
   b. parents do not initiate the communication and might not even be interested in it
   c. children are "grilled" and feel threatened
   d. discussion should be informal and non-threatening
5) To conclude Part I, say something like this: "PARENTS ARE HUMAN BEINGS. THEY HAVE GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS. YOU WILL PROBABLY FIND YOURSELF DOING ALL THESE TYPES OF 'TALKING,' BUT WHENEVER POSSIBLE, YOU SHOULD TRY TO TALK WITH YOUR CHILD, SO THAT A CHILD IS FREE TO TELL YOU THE THINGS THAT MATTER TO HIM/HER."
6) Have participants look at Part II and read along as you read aloud, including Items 1 through 7.
7) Give participants a few minutes to fill in the blanks. Encourage interaction.
8) Run through the questions, asking one or two participants to present and justify their answers. Ask probing questions as necessary to help parents clarify their thinking.

Break

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 0:56 End: 1:00

Activity #5: Talking with Your Child about School (25 minutes)

Part I.

Parents can find out all kinds of things about the school by just talking with their children. But "talking" can mean many things. What are the differences between these kinds of "talking?":

a. Some parents talk <u>at</u> their children.

b. Some parents <u>wait</u> for their children to talk to them.

c. Some parents <u>interrogate</u> their children.

d. Some parents talk <u>with</u> their children.

Part II.

Complete the following items. For numbers 1 to 6, write <u>True</u> or <u>False</u> in the blank space. For number 7, fill in the blank with a number. Be ready to tell the group <u>why</u> you chose each answer.

1) Children won't tell you about school unless you ask them. _____

2) The things children tell you are not very useful. _____

3) If children are having trouble in school, you can be sure they will talk to you about it. _____

4) You should believe everything your child tells you. There is no need to check with the teacher. _____

5) You should believe everything a teacher tells you. There is no need to check with a child. _____

6) Parents should force children to talk to them, even if the children don't want to talk. _____

7) Parents should talk to their children about school at least _____ times every week

Activity #6: Structuring the Home for Learning

Duration: 30 minutes Start: 1:01 End: 1:30

Purpose: To encourage participants to recognize the importance of structuring the home environment to support learning.

Procedures:

1) Have participants open to page 11 of their Manuals and read along silently as you read aloud everything except the four problems.
2) Tell participants that the group will work through the problems one-by-one. Tell them that you will read each problem and then give them two minutes (working alone and silently) to think up a rule which will solve the problem. They should jot their rules on the lines provided so they don't forget. Then the group will share their answers.
3) Be sure that participants understand the task. Allow them to ask clarifying questions.
4) Proceed with each of the problems as described in 2 above. If participants propose a rule which seems difficult to follow and or enforce, ask them how they would ensure that the rule would work.
5) Some obvious solutions include:
   - Problem One. Daughter will do homework at one set time every day. (She can help decide the best time.)
   - Problem Two. Each son will have a box (shoebox?) in which to keep his school things. (They can decorate them themselves.)
   - Problem Three. There will be one time during the day when TV is forbidden. (Everyone, including parents, must comply.)
   - Problem Four. For one or two hours a day, the kitchen will be turned into a study hall. No one can enter who is not planning to study. (The parent should study then, too.)

NOTE: THE TIMING ON THIS ACTIVITY IS RATHER TIGHT. YOU WILL ONLY HAVE ABOUT SIX MINUTES TO DEAL WITH EACH OF THE PROBLEMS.

Activity #6: Structuring the Home for Learning (30 minutes)

As an adult, you know how to arrange your life so that you can do the things that you have to do. Children are not as wise as you are. They need help in arranging their lives. Parents are the best people to give children the help they need.

When we talk about "structuring the home for learning," we mean making it easy for your child to study and learn at home. The best way of structuring is to make rules and stick to them. Some of the rules you make might be for the child. Other rules might be for everyone in the house.

We talked to some parents and asked them to tell us about problems they had. Four of those problems are written below. Can you help them make up rules that would solve their problems? Write your rule on the space after each problem.

Problem One: My Delaying Daughter

My daughter always delays, delays, delays! She can't do her homework when she first comes home from school because she has to go out and play. Then she has to eat dinner. Then she has to watch television. Before we know it, it's bedtime and her homework still isn't done. What can I do?

Rule: _____

Problem Two: My Three Disorganized Sons

My three boys scatter their school stuff all over the house. They can never find the things they need -- there are papers in the living room, books in the kitchen, and homework stuff in the bedroom. Half the time they end up taking the wrong books to school! What can I do?

Rule: _____

Problem Three: Hooked on TV

My youngest son is a television addict. He doesn't talk about anything else. He can recite the commercials word-for-word. Every time I tell him to do his homework, he says "Please. It's my favorite show!" I know he learns some things from watching TV, but he's not going to succeed in school unless he starts hitting the books. And it's real hard to get him to study, because the TV is always on. Somebody is always watching something. What can I do?

Rule: _____

Problem Four: Where and When

It would be nice if my four children had their own desks, but they don't. My apartment is so small, they're lucky to have their own beds!. It's hard to find a quiet place to study in our busy home. It's especially bad because everybody does their homework at different times. There's always somebody roaming around and making noise. I can't even get my own studying done! What can I do?

Rule: _____

Activity #7: Supervising Homework

Duration: 20 minutes Start: 1:31 End: 1:50

Purpose: To encourage participants to formulate a plan for supervising homework.

Procedures:

1) Have participants open to page 12 and read along silently as you read aloud.
2) Be sure participants understand the directions.
3) Allow participants a few minutes to complete their answers. If some finish early, ask them to write their own rules or to change the ones that they don't agree with.
4) Run through the seven rules, asking one or two participants to share their answers (and reasons for those answers) for each rule.
5) If discussion arises, fine. If not, have the group attempt to come up with a finalized list of rules, changing what needs changing, and adding any new rules they think should be added.

NOTE: AT THE VERY LEAST, YOU SHOULD HAVE PARTICIPANTS CROSS OUT THOSE RULES WHICH ARE CLEARLY WRONG. (IDEALLY, YOU WILL ASK THEM TO CHANGE THEM.) PARTICIPANTS WILL BE KEEPING THIS MANUAL FOR FUTURE REFERENCE, AND IT COULD BE DISASTROUS IF THEY THOUGHT YOU WERE ADVOCATING RULES 2 AND 6.

Activity #7: Supervising Homework (20 minutes)

In the last activity, we talked about making sure that your child has a set time and place to do homework. But a time and a place isn't always enough. A child needs your support and supervision.

Here is a list of rules for supervising homework. Read each rule. If you agree with the rule, write YES in the blank. If you disagree, write NO. Be ready to tell the group why you chose each answer.

RULES FOR PARENTS: SUPERVISING HOMEWORK

1. You should always check your child's homework. _____

2. You should punish your child if homework is incorrect. _____

3. If your child is having trouble with a homework assignment, you should help him/her if you can. _____

4. If your child asks you a question you can't answer, you should be honest and say that you don't know the answer. _____

5. If you can't be home when your child is doing homework, someone should be there to help. _____

6. If your child can't do a homework assignment, you should do it for him/her. _____

7. If your child often has trouble with homework assignments, you should check with the teacher. _____

Activity #8: (optional) Finding Out About Your Child's School Day

NOTE: IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW LONG GROUP DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES WILL LAST. IF, AND ONLY IF, YOU FIND YOU HAVE AT LEAST 10 MINUTES TO SPARE AT THIS POINT, YOU CAN BEGIN ACTIVITY #8. REMEMBER TO LEAVE AMPLE TIME TO WRAP UP THE SESSION AND TO ASSIGN ACTIVITY #9 (A HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT).

Duration: variable Start: variable End: 1:50

Purpose: To encourage participants to evaluate various sources of information about a child's school day.

Procedures:

1) Have participants open to page 13 of their manuals and read along silently while you read aloud.
2) Say: "HOW USEFUL ARE THESE 7 WAYS OF FINDING OUT ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL DAY?" Run through each of the Items (1 through 7), asking these questions about each:
   - "WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT THIS WAY?"
   - "WHAT'S BAD ABOUT?"
   - "HOW MUCH DOES IT TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR CHILD AND HIS/HER NEEDS?"
   - "WHAT KIND OF THINGS CAN YOU LEARN FROM THIS WAY?"
3) Some points you might want to make in respect to the seven ways are:
   1. Lets you identify with child, but today's schools might be very different.
   2. More apt to critize or praise than give specific information.
   3. Tells you about school activities, events, etc., but tells little about individual children.
   4. Tells about your child's overall performance, but not about feelings or day-to-day activities.
   5. A very important way (we'll talk more about this in Session Three next week.)
   6. The best way if you want to know what your child is doing day-to-day, and how he/she feels about it. This will also let parents spot any possible problems early -- before they affect grades on the report card.
   7. A good way to get the "feel" of a child's school.

Activity #8: Finding Out About Your Child's School Day

It's not easy for a parent to know what goes on in the school. Every morning you see your child leave for school. Every afternoon you see your child come home. But what happens during the school day?

Here are seven ways that parents can find out about what goes on in the school. How much can you learn about your child's school day from each way?

1) By remembering what it was like when you were in school.
2) By reading the local newspaper.
3) By reading school newsletters.
4) By reading report cards.
5) By talking with teachers.
6) By talking with your child.
7) By visiting your child's school.

Wrap-Up

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 1:51 End: 1:55

Purpose: To summarize the foregoing activities and to allow participants to raise any questions they might have.

Procedures:

1) Say something like this: "TODAY WE'VE TALKED ABOUT SOME OF THE THINGS YOU CAN DO IN YOUR OWN HOME TO HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED IN SCHOOL. THE MAIN THINGS WE TALKED ABOUT WERE:
   - WHY TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT SCHOOL IS IMPORTANT.
   - HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR HOME TO HELP YOUR CHILD STUDY AND LEARN.
   - HOW TO SUPERVISE HOMEWORK."
2) Ask for any additional comments or questions.
3) Ask if participants were satisfied with the session. Why or why not? What was the best things about the session? The worst? NOW ASSIGN ACTIVITY #9, BELOW.

Activity #9: Improving Your Home for Learning (to be done at home)

Assign during the last 5 minutes of session

Purpose: To encourage participants to take action toward improving the learning environment in their own homes.

Procedures:

1) Tell participants that there is another "homework" assignment due next session. They will not have to hand it in, but the group will discuss it.
2) Have participants open to page 14 of their manuals and read along silently as you read aloud.
3) Make sure that the participants understand the directions and each of the questions. Reword the questions if necessary.

Activity #9: Improving Your Home for Learning (to be done at home)

DIRECTIONS: Is your home a good place to study and learn? Take a good look. Then answer the following questions:

1. Does your child have a set time to study? If you already have a rule for this, write it below. If not, make up one that will help your child succeed in school.

   Rule #1: _____

   _____

2. Does your child have a set place to study? If you already have a rule for this, write it below. If not, make up one that will help your child succeed in school.

   Rule #2: _____

   _____

3. Think of three other rules which will help your child to learn at home. (If you need help getting ideas, look at page 11 and 12 of your Manual.) Write them below.

   Rule #3: _____

   _____

   Rule #4: _____

   _____

   Rule #5: _____

   _____

4. Tell your child about these five rules, and be ready to tell the group what he/she thinks about each rule. To help you remember, write your child's comments below.

   Rule #1: _____

   Rule #2: _____

   Rule #3: _____

   Rule #4: _____

   Rule #5: _____

Overview

SESSION THREE: WORKING WITH THE TEACHER

Session Three has three major goals:

1) To allow participants to better understand a teacher's perspective on school.
2) To encourage better communication between participants and their children's teachers.
3) To encourage participants to develop or refine strategies for effectively handling parent-teacher conferences.

In order to complete all planned activities, it will be necessary to start promptly and adhere to the following schedule:

Time Allotted	Activity
5 minutes	Introduction
20 minutes	Discussion of Activity #9: Improving Your Home for Learning
30 minutes	Activity #10: Understanding Teachers
5 minutes	Break
20 minutes	Activity #11: Communicating with Teachers
30 minutes	Activity #12: Parent-Teacher Conferences
*variable	Activity #13: What Is a Good Teacher?
5 minutes	Wrap-up
5 minutes	Assign Activity #14: Rules for My Child and Myself (to be done at home)

*Activity #13 is an optional activity and should be undertaken only if time allows.

Introduction

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 0:01 End: 0:05

Purpose: To provide an overview of the session.

Procedures:

1) Have participants take their places and set up their name plates.
2) Say something like this: "TODAY WE WILL BE TALKING ABOUT WORKING WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER. WE WILL TALK MOSTLY ABOUT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS, AND THERE WILL BE A SPECIAL ACTIVITY ABOUT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES. BEFORE WE START TALKING ABOUT TEACHERS, HOWEVER, WE WILL TALK ABOUT ACTIVITY #9, WHICH YOU DID AT HOME."

"My Teacher"
- by Lisa J., Grade 4

SESSION THREE
WORKING WITH THE TEACHER

Discussion of Activity #9: Improving Your Home for Learning

Duration: 20 minutes Start: 0:06 End: 0:25

Purpose: To encourage participants to take action toward improving the learning environment in their own homes.

Procedures:

1) Have participants open to page 14 of their manuals. On that page, they will have already written:
   - Rule #1 (governing the time at which homework is done)
   - Rule #2 (governing the place where homework is done)
   - Rule #3-5 (three other rules to improve the home for learning)
   - Their children's reaction to the 5 rules.
2) Conduct an informal discussion, asking some participants to share the rules they've written and the rationale for each rule. Encourage the group to critique and refine each rule.
3) If you have time, you might ask any or all of the following questions about a given rule:
   - "WHEN WILL YOU BEGIN TO USE THE RULE?"
   - "DOES YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND THE RULE?"
   - "WHAT WILL YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD DOESN'T FOLLOW THE RULE?"

Activity #10: Understanding Teachers

Duration: 30 minutes* Start: 0:26 End: 0:55

Purpose: To allow participants to understand school from a teacher's perspective.

Procedures:

1) Ask participants:
   - "HAVE YOU EVER REALLY THOUGHT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A TEACHER?"
   - "DO YOU THINK IT'S A GOOD JOB OR A BAD JOB?" "WHY?"
   - "DO YOU THINK IT'S AN EASY JOB OR HARD JOB?" "WHY?"
2) Have participants open to page 16 of their manuals. Tell them that you want two volunteers to act out a little play. (Try to select fairly good readers.) Choose one to be the parent and one to be the teacher.
3) Read the introductory statement for Part I. Have the volunteers read the dialogue.
4) Use your own judgment in discussing the completed dialogue. Some questions you might want to ask are:
   - "IS A TEACHER'S JOB REALLY ALL THAT HARD?" "WHY?"
   - "WHO DO YOU THINK HAS THE HARDER JOB: PARENTS OR TEACHERS?" "WHY?"

*NOTE: ACTIVITY #10 HAS TWO PARTS AND IS CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE. ALLOW ABOUT 15 MINUTES FOR EACH PART.

Activity #10: Understanding Teachers (30 minutes)

Part I. (15 minutes)

Here's a conversation we overheard between a parent and a teacher.

Parent: I love my kids, but sometimes they make me crazy.

Teacher: What do you mean?

Parent: Well, like on rainy Saturday afternoons. Their friends come over and they run around the house screaming and getting into everything.

Teacher: How many kids are you talking about altogether?

Parent: Five or six. One time I had eight kids in the house.

Teacher: That's nothing.

Parent: What!

Teacher: Did you ever really think about what it's like to be a teacher? I don't have eight kids. I don't have ten kids. Every day, I have twenty-five kids in my class.

Parent: Wow! I never thought of it that way.

Teacher: That's not all. When you have all those kids in your house, all you have to do is keep them from killing one another. I have to keep them under control and make sure that they learn what they're supposed to learn.

Parent: How do you do it?

Teacher: Sometimes I just don't know how I do it. I just keep trying and trying. And when I have a bad day, or when the kids have a bad day, I try a little harder.

Activity #10: Understanding Teachers (continued)

End: 0:55

Procedures (Part II):

5) Have participants open to page 17 and read along silently as you read aloud to the end of the directions.
6) Ask participants to react.
7) Read and solve each problem as a group. Try to reach consensus on the rule generated in response to each problem. Are the rules reasonable and enforceable?

Break

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 0:56 End: 1:00

Activity #10: Understanding Teachers (continued)

Part II. (15 minutes)

We asked a teacher to tell us about her job, and this is what she said.

"I like teaching and I'm good at it. I want all the children to do their best. I don't expect them all to be brilliant. I just expect them to learn as much as they can learn.

"But I can't do my job alone. I need parents to help me. I can take care of what goes on in the classroom, but the rest of the time, it's up to the parents. Even if a child is not a great student, he/she can succeed if the parents really care."

Then we asked the teacher how parents can help. She said that she needs help solving the three biggest problems she has with children. Can you make up a rule which will solve each of the teacher's problems?

Problem One: Absences

"I can't teach a child who doesn't come to school. I don't mind when children are sick, but if they are sick very often, they should see a doctor to find out why. Some parents keep children out of school for other reasons: to go on vacation, to babysit younger children, or even to go shopping. When they do this, they are hurting their own children. Can't parents do something about this?"

Rule: _____

_____

Problem Two: Tardiness

"Some children are always late getting to school. Every time that happens, the late child misses the opportunity to learn something important. When it happens a lot, the child falls behind and has a hard time catching up with the rest of the class. Can't parents do something about this?"

Rule: _____

_____

Problem Three: Tired Children

"Some children are always tired. When children are tired, they are not alert enough to do the work they have to do. Sometimes the children have no set bedtime and they stay up late watching television. Can't parents do something about this?"

Rule: _____

_____

Activity #11: Communicating with Teachers

Duration: 20 minutes Start: 1:01 End: 1:20

Purpose: To encourage communication between participants and their children's teachers.

Procedures:

1) Have participants open to page 18 of their manuals and read along silently while you read Part I aloud.
2) Ask them:
   - "WHAT WENT WRONG WITH THE PAINTING?"
   - "WERE THE TWO ARTISTS REALLY WORKING TOGETHER?"
   - "HOW COULD THE ARTISTS HAVE SOLVED THEIR PROBLEM?"
   - "CAN THIS STORY TEACH YOU ANY LESSON ABOUT PARENTS AND TEACHERS WORKING TOGETHER?"
3) Have participants look at Part II, and read along silently as you read the introductory statement aloud.
4) Tell participants that the group will work through the problems one-by-one. Tell them that you will read each problem and then give them two minutes (working alone and silently) to think up a solution for the problem. They should write the solution on the lines provided.
5) Discuss each problem and the solution proposed. If a participant proposes a solution which seems unrealistic or unreasonable, ask how he/she would ensure that the solution would work.

Activity #11: Communicating with Teachers (20 minutes)

Part I. Read this story and think about what went wrong.

Once upon a time there were two very good artists who decided that they would paint one picture together. The first artist worked on the picture during the day. The second artist painted at night. They both agreed that they wanted the painting to be successful, but they never talked to one another about what they were trying to paint or about how they should paint it. The first artist thought they were painting a tree. The second artist thought they were painting a house. When the painting was finished, no one knew what it was!

Part II. We asked some teachers to tell us about the three biggest problems they have in communicating with some parents. Can you think of a solution for each problem?

Problem One: No response

When I notice a child is having a problem, I get in touch with the parents. Usually, this works fine and we are able to solve the problem together. But some parents never come to see me. I keep trying for a while but, sooner or later, I just give up. Can't we do something about this?

Solution: _____

_____

Problem Two: No Connection

The best way to solve a child's problem is to deal with it right away. The quickest way to get in touch with parents is to call them on the telephone. But some parents don't have a telephone, and I don't always have the number of a friend or relative who can get in touch with them for me. Other parents are never at home because they work or go to school. Can't we do something about this?

Solution: _____

_____

Problem Three: No News Can Be Bad News

I know what goes on in my classroom, but I don't know what happens to a child when he's not there. Parents know their own children better than anybody in the world. They are the best people to help me find out about any problems their children might have. If they tell me about the problems, I can help them solve them. But some parents don't tell me when they spot a problem -- and the problem gets worse and worse. Can't we do something about this?

Solution: _____

_____

Activity #12: Parent-Teacher Conferences

Duration: 30 minutes* Start: 1:21 End: 1:50

Purpose: To encourage participants to develop strategies for effectively handling parent-teacher conferences.

Procedures (Part I):

1) Have participants open to page 19 of their manuals, and read along silently as you read the entire page aloud. Clarify the task as necessary. In order to dispel the notion that there are correct and incorrect answers, tell them that all of the choices are important, but that they have to decide which are the most important to them.
2) Allow participants a few minutes to make their choices and prepare to justify them. The lines at the bottom of the page can be used to jot notes.
3) Briefly discuss the choices participants have made.

*NOTE: ACTIVITY #12 HAS TWO PARTS AND IS CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE. ALLOW ABOUT 15 MINUTES FOR EACH PART.

Activity #12: Parent-Teacher Conferences (30 minutes)

Part I. (15 minutes)

Most schools have regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences. These conferences are a great opportunity for parents to find out all kinds of things about their children and about their children's school. When you think of all the things that you can find out, it's really surprising that some parents don't go.

Here's a list of things that you can find out at a parent-teacher conference. Circle the three things that you feel are most important to you. Be ready to tell the group why you circled the ones you did.

1) You can find out about the types of things your child is learning this year.

2) You can find out why your child is learning those things.

3) You can get to know your child's teacher.

4) You can get to see the classroom where your child will spend more than 1,000 hours this year.

5) You can meet other parents.

6) You can see some of your child's schoolwork.

7) You can find out about how much homework your child should do, and how you can help.

8) You can find out good things about your child's progress.

9) You can find out about any problems your child might be having, and how you can help solve them.

Activity #12: Parent-Teacher Conferences (continued)

End: 1:50

Procedures (Part II):

4) Have participants open to page 20 of their manual.
5) Read the introductory statement.
6) Read each step and ask:
   - "DOES ANYONE ALREADY DO THIS?"
   - "DO YOU THINK PARENTS SHOULD DO THIS?"
   - "WHY OR WHY NOT?"
7) Tell participants that you hope they will use these steps the next time they are invited to a parent-teacher conference. Have them put a star in the upper left corner of the page so they can find it for future reference.

Activity #12: Parent-Teacher Conferences (continued)

Part II. (15 minutes)

Parent-teacher conferences work best when you follow certain steps. Here are a list of steps that we think are important. Do you already do these things? Do you feel parents should do them?

Before going to the parent-teacher conference you should:

Step 1. Talk with your child about school.
Step 2. Look over your child's school work and report card.
Step 3. Write down a list of questions you want to ask the teacher.

During the parent-teacher conference, you should:

Step 4. Listen to what the teacher has to say.
Step 5. Ask questions about what the teacher tells you. If the teacher uses words you don't understand, keep asking until you do understand.
Step 6. Ask the teacher the list of questions you wrote down before the conference.
Step 7. Ask the teacher to tell you about the things your child does well.
Step 8. Ask the teacher to tell you about any problems your child might be having.
Step 9. Write down the things that you should do to help your child become a better student.

After the parent-teacher conference, you should:

Step 10. Talk with your child about the things you found out at the conference. (Don't threaten!)
Step 11. Do the things you wrote down in Step 9. (You might need to make up some new rules.)
Step 12. If you didn't like your child's teacher, don't tell the child. Your child still has to deal with the teacher every day. Try not to make your child's school day any harder than it has to be.

Activity #13: (optional) What Is a Good Teacher?

NOTE: IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW LONG GROUP DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES WILL LAST. IF, AND ONLY IF, YOU FIND THAT YOU HAVE AT LEAST 10 MINUTES TO SPARE AT THIS POINT, YOU CAN BEGIN ACTIVITY #13. REMEMBER TO LEAVE AMPLE TIME TO WRAP UP THE SESSION AND TO ASSIGN ACTIVITY #14 (A HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT).

Duration: variable Start: variable End: 1:50

Purpose: To allow participants to recognize the many skills needed to be a good teacher.

Procedures:

1) Have participants open to page 21 of their manuals and read along silently as you read the opening comments aloud.
2) Structure this activity as you see fit, based on your experience with preceding discussions.

Activity #13: What Is a Good Teacher?

Did you ever think about how hard it is to be a good teacher? Think of all the things a teacher has to know. Think of all of the things a teacher has to do.

Complete the following items by writing True or False in the blank spaces. Be ready to tell the group why you chose each answer.

1. Good teachers love children. _____
2. Good teachers never get angry. _____
3. Good teachers are intelligent. _____
4. Good teachers are patient. _____
5. Good teachers never have a bad day. _____
6. Good teachers are willing to forgive mistakes. _____
7. Good teachers know how to talk to children. _____
8. Good teachers prefer very bright children. _____
9. Good teachers make children work hard. _____
10. Good teachers never punish children. _____
11. Good teachers don't care about their salaries. _____
12. Good teachers love learning. _____

Wrap-Up

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 1:51 End: 1:55

Purpose: To summarize the foregoing activities and to allow participants to raise any questions they might have.

Procedures:

1) Say something like this: "TODAY WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT HOW YOU CAN WORK WITH THE TEACHER TO HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED IN SCHOOL."
   - "DO YOU THINK YOU UNDERSTAND TEACHERS A LITTLE BETTER?" "HOW?"
   - "DO YOU THINK THAT IT'S IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS TO WORK TOGETHER?" "WHY?"
   - "DO YOU FEEL MORE CONFIDENT ABOUT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES?" "WHY?"
2) Ask for any additional comments or questions.
3) Ask if participants were satisfied with the session. Why or why not? What was the best part of the session? The worst? NOW ASSIGN ACTIVITY #14, BELOW.

Activity #14: Rules for My Child and Myself (to be done at home)

Assign during the last 5 minutes of session.

Purpose: To allow participants to reduce the number of rules they plan to follow to a manageable number.

Procedures:

1) Tell participants that there is one last "homework" assignment due next session. They will not have to hand it in, but the group will discuss it.
2) Have participants open to page 22 of their manuals and read along silently while you read aloud. Emphasize that they should only write down rules which they need and which they plan to follow.
3) Make sure participants understand the directions. Reword if necessary.

Activity #14: Rules for My Child and Myself (to be done at home)

DIRECTIONS: During the last two sessions, we've talked about many things you can do to help your child succeed in school. You've made up many rules. But when you have too many rules, it's hard to follow them all. When that happens, everything falls apart, and sometimes you don't follow any rules! Look over everything we've done so far, and try to pick out the 5 most important rules which you plan to follow. One rule should deal with absences and tardiness. One rule should deal with homework. The other three rules are up to you. Write down the 5 most important rules. Be ready to tell the group how you will make sure that each rule will work.

AFTER WE DISCUSS THESE RULES NEXT WEEK, CUT THEM OUT AND HANG THEM ON YOUR REFRIGERATOR WHERE EVERYBODY CAN SEE THEM

RULES FOR MY CHILD AND MYSELF

Rule #1 (absences and tardiness) _____

_____

Rule #2 (homework) _____

_____

Rule #3 _____

_____

Rule #4 _____

_____

Rule #5 _____

_____

Overview

SESSION FOUR: WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL

Session Four has four major goals:

1) To encourage participants to develop stragegies for the effective resolution of learning problems.
2) To ensure that participants are able to comprehend the written materials which the local district expects parents to read.
3) To provide participants with information about local school policies and procedures, and about the rights of parents.
4) To allow participants to raise any unresolved issues or questions they would like to discuss.

In order to complete all planned activities, it will be necessary to start promptly and adhere to the following schedule:

Time Allotted	Activity
5 minutes	Introduction
35 minutes	Activity #15: Solving Serious Learning Problems
30 minutes	Activity #16: Local Policies, Procedures and Paperwork*
5 minutes	Break
40 minutes	Open Session
*variable	Activity #17: Rewards and Punishments
5 minutes	Wrap-up

*Activity #17 is an optional activity, and should be undertaken only if time allows.

NOTE: ACTIVITY #16 REQUIRES SUBSTANTIAL PREPARATION ON THE PART OF THE FACILITATOR. SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARATION ARE INCLUDED IN THE APPENDIX (SEE PAGE A3).

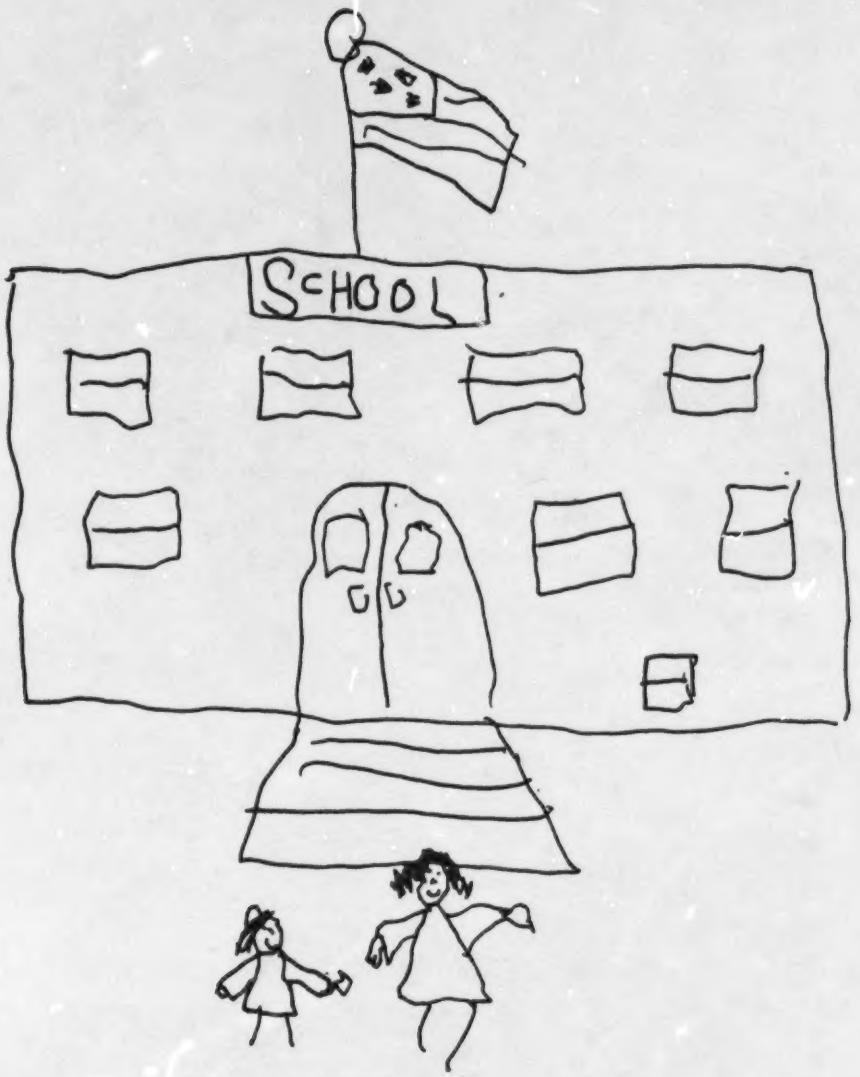
Introduction

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 0:01 End: 0:05

Purpose: To provide an overview of the session.

Procedures:

1) Have participants take their places and set up their name plates.
2) Say something like this: "THIS IS OUR LAST SESSION. DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THIS SESSION, WE WILL TALK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN WORK WITH THE SCHOOL TO MAKE SURE THAT YOUR CHILD IS A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT. DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THIS SESSION, THE GROUP WILL DECIDE WHAT WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT."



"Me and Mommy Visit My School"
by Jerome L., Grade 2

SESSION FOUR
WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL

Activity #15: Solving Serious Learning Problems

Duration: 35 minutes Start: 0:06 End: 0:40

Purpose: To encourage participants to develop strategies for the effective resolution of learning problems.

Procedures (Part I):

1) Have participants open to page 24 of their manuals and read along silently as you read the introductory paragraphs aloud.
2) Ask if there are any comments or questions.
3) Have participants read along silently as you read Part I of the story aloud.
4) Read the directions and have them complete the list on their own. Then discuss the things that students have listed. Don't allow students to list things that the Joneses don't know for certain (e.g., there is no evidence that the boy is lazy). Be careful to distinguish facts from opinions.
5) Ask the group, "WHY DID THE FATHER DECIDE HE WAS LAZY? DID HE BASE HIS DECISION ON WHAT HE KNEW ABOUT THE BOY'S READING, OR ON HIS OWN PERSONAL FEELINGS?"
6) Discuss as appropriate.

NOTE: ACTIVITY #15 HAS FOUR PARTS AND IS CONTINUED ON THE FOLLOWING TWO PAGES. BECAUSE THE FOUR PARTS ARE NOT FREE-STANDING, SPECIFIC TIME ALLOTMENTS ARE NOT SUGGESTED. YOU HAVE 35 MINUTES FOR THE ENTIRE ACTIVITY.

Activity #15: Solving Serious Learning Problems (35 minutes)

Nobody likes problems. Some people try to ignore problems and hope they will go away. Unfortunately, they almost never do.

This is especially true with learning problems that children sometimes have. If you ignore them, they usually get worse. This year's little problems become next year's big problems. It's important that parents do everything they can to help their children solve learning problems as soon as possible.

What is a learning problem? A learning problem is anything that prevents your child from succeeding in school. When the problem is small, parents can sometimes solve it by giving the child extra attention. But sometimes even the best parents are faced with problems they just can't solve by themselves. When a child has a learning problem that is serious and won't go away, parents need help.

Fortunately, schools don't expect parents to solve serious learning problems by themselves. Schools have a staff of experts who are ready, willing, and able to help children with special educational needs.

Here is a story about a child who had a serious learning problem. As you read it, think of how you would feel if you were Gregory's parents.

The Jones Boy (Part I)

Gregory Jones is in the second grade. He is failing reading. Mrs. Jones tries to help her son, but it doesn't seem to do any good. When she asks him to read out loud, he can hardly say any of the words.

Mr. Jones is angry. He is embarrassed that his son is failing. He yells at Gregory, saying, "You're not dumb. You're lazy!" Every time the boy gets a failing grade, the father beats him.

Mrs. Jones goes to see Gregory's teacher to find out what is wrong. The teacher says, "I'm not sure what is wrong, Mrs. Jones. I'm trying to give Gregory special attention, but it's hard because I have so many students. I give him special assignments, but he doesn't seem to be able to do these either." The teacher and the mother agree to keep trying for two more weeks to see if things get any better.

But two weeks pass, and Gregory still is failing reading.

BEFORE YOU CAN SOLVE A PROBLEM, YOU HAVE TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THE PROBLEM IS. GREGORY'S PARENTS KNOW THAT THERE IS A PROBLEM. BUT WHAT DO THEY KNOW ABOUT THE PROBLEM? LIST THE THINGS THAT THEY KNOW ABOUT HIS READING.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Activity #15: Solving Serious Learning Problems (continued)

Procedures (Part II):

7) Have participants open to page 25 of their manuals and read along silently as you read Part II aloud.
8) Ask:
   - "DO YOU KNOW WHAT A CHILD STUDY TEAM IS?"
   - "DO YOU THINK A CHILD STUDY TEAM IS A GOOD THING OR A BAD THING?" "WHY?"
   - "WHY DO YOU THINK MR. JONES REACTED THE WAY THAT HE DID?" "WAS HE RIGHT?"
   - "HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOU WERE TOLD THAT YOUR CHILD NEEDED A CHILD STUDY TEAM?"
   - "WHAT DO YOU THINK A SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST DOES?"
     (NOTE: In respect to this last question, be sure participants understand that a school psychologist is not a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, therapist, or even a counseling psychologist. The principal task of a school psychologist is to determine the learning potential (ability) of students; in addition, he/she might also attempt to assess the emotional well-being of a child. Only rarely does he/she do regular counseling with a student.)
9) Discuss as appropriate.

Procedures (Part III):

10) Read Part III of the story aloud.
11) Ask:
   - "DO YOU KNOW WHAT AN IEP IS?"
   - "IF YOU WERE GREGORY'S PARENTS, WOULD YOU HAVE AGREED TO LET THE CHILD STUDY TEAM LOOK INTO THE PROBLEM?" "WHY OR WHY NOT?"
   - "WHAT DO YOU THINK THE CHILD STUDY TEAM FOUND OUT?" "WHY?"
12) Discuss as appropriate.

NOTE: ACTIVITY #15 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.

Activity #15: Solving Learning Problems (continued)

The Jones Boy (Part II)

Mrs. Jones calls the teacher, and together they schedule a meeting. Four people are at the meeting: Mr. and Mrs. Jones, the teacher, and the school principal.

After discussing the problem, the principal says, "I don't think we can decide what to do yet. First, we have to be sure what the problem is. I suggest that we have a child study team look into Gregory's problem."

Mrs. Jones asks, "What is a child study team?"

The principal says, "A child study team is a group of educational experts. It is their job to figure out how to help children who are having trouble learning. A child study team is made up of a school social worker, a learning disabilities teacher-consultant and a school psychologist. Now in this case --"

"Stop right there!" shouts Mr. Jones. "No son of mine is going to a psychologist. He's not crazy -- he's lazy, that's all."

The Jones Boy (Part III)

The principal waits until Mr. Jones calms down and then says, "Don't be upset, Mr. Jones. I'm not suggesting that your son has a psychological problem. All I'm saying is that we know that Gregory has a problem, and we need expert help to figure out exactly what that problem is and how we can help him."

Mrs. Jones asks, "Well, what does a child study team do?"

The principal says, "They do a variety of things. They talk to you, the parents, to find out what you think. They talk to the teacher. They give your son some tests to find out what he is capable of and the best way for him to learn. Then they decide how to solve the problem. If they decide that Gregory needs special help, they will write up a special plan for his learning. This plan is called an Individualized Education Program or, for short, an "IEP."

"Sounds like a lot of work," says Mr. Jones. "How much will all this cost us?"

"Not a penny," answers the principal.

Mrs. Jones asks, "Will we be told what the child study team finds out?"

The principal answers, "If we find that your son needs special help, you will be invited to a meeting to discuss the problem. The child study team will tell you what they have found out, and with your help, they will work out an IEP for Gregory."

In the end, Mr. and Mrs. Jones agree to have a child study team investigate Gregory's problem.

Activity #15: Solving Serious Learning Problems (continued)

End: 0:40

Procedures (Part IV):

13) Have participants open to page 26 and read along silently as you read the introductory statement aloud.
14) Read the endings one-by-one. Allow participants to react.
15) Say, "NOTICE THAT EACH ENDING RESULTED IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF A DIFFERENT PROBLEM REQUIRING A DIFFERENT SOLUTION."
16) Ask:
    - "ARE ANY OF THE ENDINGS IMPOSSIBLE OR UNLIKELY?" "WHY?"
    - "COULD THE PARENTS AND THE TEACHER HAVE DONE THE RIGHT THING WITHOUT THE HELP OF THE CHILD STUDY TEAM?"
    - "DO YOU THINK CHILD STUDY TEAMS ARE A GOOD IDEA OR A BAD IDEA?"
17) Read the remainder of the page and allow participants to react.

Activity #15: Solving Serious Learning Problems (continued)

The Jones Boy (Part IV)

THE STORY OF GREGORY JONES COULD HAVE A VARIETY OF ENDINGS. HERE ARE FOUR POSSIBILITIES:

Ending #1: Vision Problem

The child study team suspected that Gregory could not see what he was trying to read. They sent the boy to the school nurse for a vision test. After testing him, the nurse sent Gregory to an eye doctor. Now Gregory wears glasses and his reading is fine.

Ending #2: Special Reading Problem

The child study team found out that Gregory was very intelligent, but he was having trouble remembering what letters made what sounds. Now Gregory is taking special reading classes, and he is beginning to improve. Within two years, he'll be reading as well as the other students.

Ending #3: Emotional Problem

The child study team found out that Gregory was terrified of his father. He was always nervous when he tried to read because he knew that if he failed, his father would beat him. When he took a test, he froze up. The child study team explained the problem to Mr. Jones. At first he was angry, and said "I don't need you butting into my life." With Mrs. Jones' help, he came to realize that he was hurting his son physically, mentally, and emotionally. Now he doesn't beat Gregory any more. Slowly but surely, they are becoming friends, and Gregory is doing much better in school.

Ending #4: Motivational Problem

The child study team found out that Gregory was lazy. He needed to work harder, but his father's beatings only made him more stubborn. Together, Gregory's parents and teacher worked out a system to make sure that Gregory did his work every day. He's beginning to improve and, little by little, he's beginning to enjoy reading.

HERE ARE SOME STEPS TO FOLLOW IF YOU THINK YOUR CHILD HAS A LEARNING PROBLEM:

Step #1. TRY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM YOURSELF. Try to figure out what the problem is, then give your child the kind of special attention he/she needs. (Don't assume that a child who is doing poorly in school is lazy. There might be a more serious problem.) If your solution doesn't work, go to step #2.

Step #2. TRY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM WITH THE TEACHER. Make an appointment to see the teacher. Find out what the teacher knows about the problem. Try to work out a plan. If this doesn't work, go to Step #3.

Step #3. TRY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM WITH THE PRINCIPAL. Make an appointment to see the principal. Sometimes the teacher will do this for you, but you may have to do it yourself. Explain the problem, and describe what you and the teacher have already done. Ask to have your child tested, either by a child study team or by some specialist in the school.

Activity #16: Local Policies, Procedures and Paperwork

Duration: 30 minutes Start: 0:41 End: 1:10

Purposes: 1) To provide participants with information about local school policies and procedures, and about the rights of parents.
2) To ensure that participants are able to comprehend the written materials which the local district expects parents to read.

NOTE: THIS ACTIVITIY REQUIRES SUBSTANTIAL PREPARATION ON THE PART OF THE FACILITATOR. SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARATION ARE INCLUDED IN THE APPENDIX (SEE PAGE A3). DETERMINE THE PROCEDURES BASED ON THE CONTENT YOU SELECT.

Procedures:

Break

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 1:11 End: 1:15

Open Session

Duration: 40 minutes Start: 1:16 End: 1:55

Purpose: To allow participants to raise any unresolved issues or questions they would like to discuss.

Content: At the discretion of the group. (You might wish to begin by discussing the last homework assignment, Activity #14 on page 22.)

Procedures: At the discretion of the facilitator.

Activity #16: Local Policies, Procedures and Paperwork (30 minutes)

Use these lines to take notes:

Activity #17: Rewards and Punishments

NOTE: IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW LONG GROUP DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES WILL LAST. IF, AND ONLY IF, YOU FIND THAT YOU HAVE AT LEAST 10 MINUTES TO SPARE AT THIS POINT, YOU CAN BEGIN ACTIVITY #17. REMEMBER TO LEAVE TIME TO WRAP UP THE SESSION.

Duration: variable Start: variable End: 1:55

Purpose: To encourage participants to consider the consequences of using rewards and punishments to foster learning.

Procedures:

1) Have participants open to page 28 of their manuals and read along silently as you read the introductory statement and the four questions aloud.
2) Allow the participants to react.
3) Read the directions and each situation one-by-one. Have participants answer the questions orally for each situation.
4) Discuss as appropriate.

Wrap-up

Duration: 5 minutes Start: 1:56 End: 2:00

Purpose: To summarize the foregoing activities and bring the seminar to a close.

Procedures:

At the discretion of the facilitator. Ask the participants what they thought about the last session, and about the seminar as a whole. What was the best part? The worst? You might want to suggest that participants exchange phone numbers so that they can keep in touch in the future to talk about their children and their schools. You also might want to tell them about the other learning opportunities at your adult education program.

Activity #17: Rewards and Punishments

When you think about it, children are really at the mercy of their parents. Unless parents are very cruel, no one can interfere with the way they treat their children. Because of this, parents should be especially careful about how they use rewards and punishments to try to make their children succeed in school. Before they reward or punish their children, parents should ask themselves the following four questions:

1) Is the reward or punishment fair and reasonable?
2) Will I really do what I say I'm going to do?
3) How will the reward or punishment affect the way my child views learning?
4) How will the reward or punishment affect the way my child views me?

DIRECTIONS: Answer the four questions for each of the following situations.

Situation #1. Janice's mother tells her that if she gets all A's on her next report card, they can go to the circus. On her last report card, Janice got all D's. Do you think Janice will be going to the circus?

Situation #2. Fred's father says that if he doesn't miss any school this marking period, he will buy Fred a camera. Fred's father really can't afford a camera. Fred gets a virus and misses one day of school at the end of the marking period. The father refuses to buy the camera.

Situation #3. Pam and Alice are sisters. Their mother tells them that whoever gets the highest grades on the next report card will get $20. The one who gets the lowest grades will get a spanking. Alice is a lot smarter than Pam. Guess what happens?

Situation #4. Jimmy is having trouble with math. His father tells him that if he tries hard, he can go bowling with his friends. Jimmy tries extra hard but his grades do not improve. His father lets him go bowling.

Situation #5. Mary's mother says that if she doesn't finish her homework, she can't have any dinner. When dinner time comes around, Mary hasn't even started her homework. Her mother fells sorry for her, and lets her eat dinner with the family anyway.

A P P E N D I X

How to Conduct a PLACES Workshop

How to Conduct a PLACES Workshop

Introduction

PLACES (Parents Learning to Assist Children in the Elementary School) is a self-contained, flexible adult education workshop which can help parents, especially undereducated parents, learn how to facilitate the elementary school success of their children.

The PLACES workshop is self-contained in that it is designed to be a free-standing instructional component which can be offered by an existing adult education program on an as-needed basis. The workshop does not require any special preparation on the part of participants, nor does it require that participants be engaged in the same or even similar educational endeavors (i.e., ABE, high school completion, and vocational education students can be mixed together in a single workshop). Further, PLACES is self-contained in that all essential instructional materials are contained between the covers of this handbook. Participant Manuals are easily (and legally) reproducible from masters contained herein.

PLACES is flexible in terms of duration, target population, and facilitator characteristics. The workshop consists of four sessions which can be offered once a week for four weeks or twice a week for two weeks; alternatively, each of the sessions (or for that matter, each of the activities) can be offered as a free-standing instructional unit to augment ongoing basic skills programming. The workshop is appropriate for adult learners at most levels of academic proficiency, in that the readability level of the Participant Manual is 4.0 (computed using the Fry Graph). When the workshop is offered to poorer readers, the facilitator should take the time to read aloud all passages and directions in the Participant Manual; when participants are all highly skilled readers, the oral reading can be dispensed with, allowing more time for group discussion. Finally, PLACES is flexible in that it does not presuppose group dynamics skills on the part of the facilitator. Inexperienced discussion leaders will find all the help they need for successful group leadership in the directions/suggestions which accompany each activity and in this appendix.

PLACES is predicated on the belief that parents themselves are a vital resource for identifying the educational needs and for solving the school-related problems of their own children. The developers of these materials do not presume to know exactly what constitutes effective parenting. Effective parenting will vary considerably based on the culture, values, experiences, and available resources of the participants and their children. The principal merit of PLACES is that it bring parents together and affords them an opportunity to discuss their concerns, clarify their own stances in respect to these concerns, and ultimately evolve their own plans for effective action. The materials in the Participant Manual will determine what parents will talk about, but we cannot predict what they will say or, for that matter, precisely what they will learn. Our evaluation results show that parents do learn, but that they experience growth in different areas and in different ways.

Now that you know what a PLACES workshop is, you are still left with the question "How do I conduct a PLACES workshop?" The remainder of this appendix will answer that question.

Conducting a PLACES Workshop

There is nothing especially difficult about conducting a PLACES workshop. The steps suggested below are the steps that characterize most sound educational planning.

Step One: Recruiting Participants

The way in which you recruit participants for PLACES will depend largely on the nature of your local adult education program. If you choose to offer the workshop as a "special event," you might want to announce the workshop at a staff meeting and seek referrals from counselors and teachers in your program. In large, centralized learning centers, posters or direct invitations will probably turn up enough participants to offer the workshop. If basic skills enrollments in your program are down, or if you desire to gain local visibility, you might choose to involve local elementary school administrators in your recruitment efforts. This will work best if you form an informal "steering committee" consisting of the adult education director, the facilitator, and a representative of the local elementary school (e.g., an elementary school principal, a basic skills coordinator, or a parent education coordinator). The steering committee can jointly plan and implement recruitment efforts through targeted elementary schools in your district. In one of our pilot sites, we sent flyers home with students in Title I elementary schools. (A sample flyer appears as page A7 of this appendix.) This resulted not only in enough participants for the PLACES workshops, but in new enrollees for the adult basic skills programs.

How many participants are "enough?" The workshop will work best if you have at least six participants and no more than twelve. Given that most adult education activities experience "no show" and drop-out problems, it might be wise to over-enroll the workshop.

Since the goal of PLACES is the enhancement of parenting skills in relation to elementary school success, you should restrict participation to parents who currently have children in the elementary school. (We defined elementary school as grades 1-6 in our development work.) Such a restriction ensures that parents will have interests in common and experiences which are appropriate to share with the group.

Step Two: Scheduling the Workshop

The best time to offer the workshop will depend on when potential participants are available, as well as the operating hours of your adult education facility. In general, you should avoid hours when childcare might present a particular problem for participants (e.g., late afternoons or days when schools are closed). You should emphasize the fact that children are not permitted to accompany parents to the sessions.

If you are going to offer the entire workshop, you should avoid scheduling more than two sessions per week. Participants will need time between sessions, not only to do the "homework" assignments, but to assimilate the learning the course entails.

The physical environment of the room in which the workshop is offered can affect the extent to which participants feel free to discuss

and interact. Ideally, the workshop will be offered around a table; if you must use student desks, be sure that you arrange them in a circle and that you, too, sit at a student desk. A coffee pot and participant-supplied refreshments can help to foster an atmosphere that is informal and and truly adult.

Step Three: Preparing the Materials

1. PARTICIPANT MANUALS. You will need a Participant Manual for each participant. We strongly urge you to allow participants to keep their manuals at the end of the seminar; there is much in the manuals that they will find useful for future reference. Participant Manuals should be produced directly from this handbook. Simply xerox all the left-facing pages (i.e., those on the reader's right) in this guide, except for those in this appendix and the first title page. Each Participant Manual thus should include one title page, a table of contents, and pages 1 through 28. For the most inexpensive manuals, simply collate and staple. More attractive and durable manuals can be produced using a hole-puncher and cardboard covers (which cost about 25 cents each).

2. HANDBOOKS. Each facilitator should have his/her own copy of this handbook. In this way, facilitators can make marginal notes which will help them adapt the workshop to their own teaching style. You might want to retain an unmarked copy in your program files to serve as a duplicating master, and xerox additional copies as you need them. Alternatively, you can purchase (at cost) additional copies of the handbook from the CENTER FOR ADULT DEVELOPMENT, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, 10 SEMINARY PLACE, NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08903.

3. NAME PLATES. Participant interaction will be enhanced if the participants know and remember one another's names. Name plates can be a big help in this regard. You (or the participants themselves) can make name plates with normal-sized, plain white sheets of paper, a stapler, and a magic marker. Simply fold a sheet into four equal sections, overlap the two end sections, and staple. Print names boldly on the front; in most cases, first names will be appropriate.

4. CERTIFICATES. Too often in adult education, learners receive little or no formal recognition for their accomplishments. In our development work, we found that certificates were greatly appreciated by participants. Further, since we awarded certificates only to those participants who attended every session, we found that the promise of a certificate had a positive effect on attendance. You can make up your own certificates by purchasing blank certificate stock and typing in all appropriate information except the name of the participant and the date. Retain this as a master for future use. When you determine who will be receiving a certificate, xerox enough copies and fill in the names and dates. The certificate will probably mean more to participants than you might at first think. You might show them the certificate at the opening session as an incentive to regular participation. A copy of the certificate we awarded at one of our pilot sites appears as page A8 of this appendix.

5. SPECIAL MATERIALS FOR ACTIVITY #16. This activity requires the facilitator to provide participants with a working knowledge of local of necessity, is left largely to the discretion of the facilitator. Here are some suggestions for collecting appropriate materials:

a) Contact local elementary school administrators and request copies of the written materials they expect parents to read and comprehend. These materials will vary from district to district, but you might request the following:

- blank report cards
- report forms for standardized tests
- school calendars
- homework policies
- other school policies (attendance, detention, etc.)
- pamphlets explaining child study teams and the IEP

In some districts, these materials might already be consolidated into a single "Handbook for Parents."

b) Ask the elementary school administrators to tell you about any opportunities parents have to get involved in the schools. Useful information includes:

- "Back to School Night"
- Parent-teacher conferences
- American Education Week activities
- Procedures for classroom observations by parents

c) Information about parents' rights should be an integral part of the activity. A readable and inexpensive ($3 plus $1.50 postage and handling) source of information for the facilitator is a handbook produced by Legal Services of New Jersey. The handbook is entitled, Public School Education in New Jersey: A Legal Handbook for Parents of Public School Children. Orders should be addressed to LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY, INC., 78 NEW STREET, NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901.

Step Four: Preparing Yourself

Other than Activity #16 (discussed above), you will find that the majority of the planning has been done for you, and you have only to familiarize yourself with the directions/suggestions presented in the Guide for each activity. Some of the facilitators who conducted our pilot sessions felt that, if anything, the Guide "over-programmed" the facilitator. We agree, and invite facilitators to deviate from the Guide as they see fit. We do urge, however, that before conducting any activity, you familiarize yourself thoroughly with the participant materials and with the directions/suggestions provided in the Guide. Try to be sure that any changes you make do not alter or diffuse the focus of any given activity. The first time you teach the workshop you might want to follow the Guide exactly. Your experience can then dictate desirable changes based on what worked (or did not work) for you.

Step Five: Conducting the Workshop

Conducting a PLACES workshop should be a challenging experience for you. Many unanticipated situations will arise, and, because these situations are unpredictable, you will have to rely on your own instincts and judgment more often than in a more traditional educational setting. You will have to fill a variety of roles, including:

- Discussion leader. You will have to keep the discussion firmly focused on the present problem and moving toward a constructive and satisfactory resolution.

- Moderator. You will have to control the atmosphere of the sessions to ensure that healthy controversy does not degenerate into antagonism. In addition, you will be responsible for the pacing of the sessions to ensure that all activities can take place within the allotted time.

- Facilitator. You will have to make sure that each learner is an active participant in the workshop. Learners must express their beliefs and attitudes in order that they may be clarified through discussion with other learners.

- Participant. Your own contributions to discussions will reduce the distance between teacher and learner, in that you will be viewed more as a peer and less as a authority figure. Your participation in activities can do much to set the tone of frankness and self-examination which is essential for the success of the workshop.

Can you fill these roles? We believe that most sensitive adult educators have the skills necessary for the successful conducting of the PLACES workshop and that no special training is necessary.

Most facilitators come away from the opening session with a sense of uneasiness -- with a sense that things could have gone better than they did. If this happens to you, don't worry about it. In the first place, the opening session is the hardest for all concerned. Participants tend to be shy and anxious, and you'll find that most of these feelings evaporate by the middle of the second session. Second, you are probably your own harshest critic; participants probably believe that the session went quite well.

During each of the sessions, there are three things you should keep in mind: group interaction, focus, and timing. If you can handle these three things, the success of the workshop is practically guaranteed.

In respect to group interaction, remember the following:

- Don't dominate the group. Participants will probably allow you to assume as much control as you wish. The real trick is in getting them to speak out.

- Encourage interaction among participants. Try to get them to talk to one another -- not just to you.

- Discourage sub-grouping. When more than one discussion occurs at the same time, disorder results and a sense of group unity is lost.

- Try to draw out reluctant participants. Individuals will learn best if they participate in the discussions. Be careful, however, not to push too hard -- especially in the first session.

In respect to focus, remember the following:

- Discourage digressions. Most groups include at least one participant who is prone to rambling. Try to spot him/her early and be on guard. The suggested questions in the Guide will help you put the group back on the track.

- Be sure, however, that an apparent digression is truly a digression. Some people just take longer to say what they have to say. Others, especially when they're talking about something of critical importance to them, take a roundabout route.

- If a participant raises an important issue which is irrelevant or tangential to the current activity, urge him/her to jot it down and save it for the open session in Session Four.

- Try not to let one participant's problem(s) sidetrack or dominate the activity.

In respect to timing, remember the following:

- The timing of sessions is tight; at times, it will seem unreasonably so. When this happens, you will have to make a choice between covering all the content quickly or covering less content in depth. Make the choice as you see fit.

- An argument for the tight timing proposed in the Guide is this: It is better for an activity to be cut short in its prime rather than have it die a slow and boring death. The workshop is designed to get people thinking about their concerns, and they are probably thinking the hardest when things are moving briskly. When an activity winds down too far, people become bored, even with their own concerns.

- When time runs out on an activity, try to give (or have a participant give) a quick, one- or two-sentence wrap-up, stating why the group did that activity, and what was learned.

- If you find yourself constantly distracted by your role as time-keeper, you might try one of these systems.
  - -- announce to the group the time at which a activity must end. Then they will share the responsibility for keeping on schedule.
  - -- bring in a wind-up timer and set it at the beginning of each activity.

We hope you enjoy conducting the PLACES workshop. We'd be happy to receive feedback from you about the materials, activities, and your own and your learners' reactions.

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New Brunswick Adult High School

and

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* The course is for parents of children in grades 1 through 6.
* There is no charge for the course.
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* The course will meet at convenient locations throughout New Brunswick.
* You can attend the course in the morning or in the evening.
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